

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 05080 021602Z

43

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 5080

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR SY LE PLO

SUBJ: SYRO-PALESTINIAN ACCORD VIEWED FROM DAMASCUS

1. SUMMARY: SYRO-PALESTINIAN AGREEMENT REITERATED POINTS PREVIOUSLY AGREED UPON BY PARTIES IN FEBRUARY AND JUNE; TERMS OF AGREEMENT CONTAIN NO NEW POINTS OF DEPARTURE. ASAD HAD SIGNALLED BEFORE QADDUMI'S ARRIVAL THAT SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON NOT NEGOTIABLE WITH PLO BUT ONLY WITH LEBANESE, PRESUMABLY NEW SARKIS ADMINISTRATION. REPORTED PRIVATE PLEDGE BY ASAD TO WITHDRAW FROM SOFAR DEPENDENT UPON IMPLEMENTATION OF AGREEMENT. ASAD DEMONSTRATED
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 05080 021602Z

TO ARAB AND FOREIGN CRITICS HE MAINTINING TOUGH BUT

FLEXIBLE POSTURE TOWARD PALESTINIANS. HE DERIVED SOME BENEFIT FROM ACCORD WHILE ARAFAT LOST LITTLE OF SUBSTANCE. END SUMMARY.

2. JULY 29 SYRO-PALESTINIAN ACCORD STRIKES US AS TACTICAL ACCOMMODATION BOTH SIDES FELT COMPELLED TO MAKE IN RESPONSE TO VARIOUS PRESSURES RATHER THAN MAJOR WATERSHED IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP AND IN EFFORTS TO RESOLVE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR. IN DAYS SINCE ITS SIGNATURE IT APPARENTLY HAS HAD LITTLE EFFECT UPON COURSE OF FIGHTING IN LEBANON; DIPLOMATICALLY, JOINT STATEMENT ACCOMPANYING TEXT GENERATED EXPECTED EGYPTIAN COUNTER-ATTACK AGAINST SYRIA AS WELL AS ARAFAT'S DENIALS THAT HE AUTHORIZED STATEMENT.

3. SYRIAN MOTIVATION FOR ACQUIESCING IN TERMS OF AGREEMENT SEEMS CLEAR. AGREEMENT PUBLICLY COMMITTED SYRIA TO NOTHING BEYOND POSITIONS IT HAD ADOPTED PREVIOUSLY, BOTH IN FEBRUARY 14 DOCUMENT AND IN WILLINGNESS TO APPROVE ARAB LEAGUE INVOLVEMENT DURING JUNE. SYRIA HAS NEVER ABANDONED BASIC ELEMENTS OF FEB 14 FORMULA -- CEASEFIRE SUPERVISED BY TRIPARTITE COMMITTEE, POLITICAL EFFORT TO ENGAGE ALL FACTIONS IN FORMATION OF NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT, AND PALESTINIAN PRESENCE REGULATED BY CAIRO AGREEMENT. BY ADOPTING AGREEMENT WHICH IN EFFECT REITERATED POINTS AGREED UPON IN FEB AND LATER APPROVED BY AL, ADAD ONCE AGAIN HAS MANAGED TO LIMIT CRITICISM OF SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON, APPEAR RESPONSIBLE TO SAUDI, KUWAIT AND LIBYAN PRESSURES AND REMIND ALL OF GENERALLY ACCEPTED LIMITS ON PALESTINIAN ROLE IN LEBANON WITHOUT UNDERCUTTING HIS PLANS FOR RESTORING LEBANESE UNITY UNDER SARKIS. REPORTEDLY UNPUBLICIZED UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN SYRIANS AND PALESTINIANS TO END HOSTILE PROPAGANDA BROADCASTS REFLECTED SENSITIVITY OF FORMER TO PALESTINIAN MEDIA CAMPAIGN WHICH SUCCEEDED IN EMBARRASSING DAMASCUS REGIME, AND THUS CAN BE VIEWED AS NET PLUS FOR ASAD. ON OTHER HAND, ASAD PLEDGE TO WITHDRAW FROM SOFAR IS ONLY EFFECTIVE UPON IMPLEMENTATION OF ACCORD. SYRIAN CONTROL OF BEKAA NOT AFFECTED BY IT.

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PAGE 03 DAMASC 05080 021602Z

4. PLO MOTIVATION FOR SIGNING AGREEMENT LESS CLEAR. REPORTED SYRIAN AGREEMENT TO WITHDRAW TROOPS FROM SOFAR NOT CONTAINED IN PUBLIC SECTIONS OF ACCORD, FOR ASAD ASSERTED IN HIS JULY 20 SPEECH ON EVE OF QADDUMI'S ARRIVAL IN DAMASCUS THAT PALESTINIANS HAD NO RIGHT TO ASK FOR SYRIAN MILITARY WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON; ASAD HAS CONSISTENTLY MANEUVERED TO PRESERVE HIS WITHDRAWAL OPTIONS UNTIL HE ABLE TO DEAL WITH LEBANESE GOVERNMENT PRE-

SIDED OVER BY SARKIS. ARAFAT APPARENTLY OBTAINED FROM SYRIA PROMISE TO PERSUADE CHRISTIANS TO PERMIT WITHDRAWAL OF PALESTINIAN FORCES FROM TELL ZAATAR. FOR PALESTINIANS WORRIED ABOUT FURTHER DETERIORATION OF THEIR POSITION IN LEBANON, SYRIAN REITERATION OF PLEDGE TO ABIDE BY STATUS QUO ANTE -- CAIRO ACCORD -- WITH FEB 14 MODIFICATIONS PROVIDED SOME SLIGHT REASSURANCE. ARAFAT FOR REASONS RELATING TO HIS OWN POLITICAL FUTURE WITHIN PLO TENSIONS RESULTING FROM AGREEMENT WHICH PRESUMABLY ENHANCES HIS OWN OPPORTUNITY TO MANUEVER BY UTILIZING INTER-ARAB QUARRELS. ARAFAT UNDOUBTEDLY FEELS MORE CONFIDENT OF HIS ABILITY TO RESIST SYRIAN BLANDISHMENTS IN ABSENCE OF SAIQA FROM PLO COUNCILS AND WITH SOVIETS PRESSURING SARG TO COME TO TERMS.

5. ABSENCE OF ANY STARTLING DEPARTURES IN AGREEMENT LEADS US TO CONCLUDE THAT BOTH SIDES WARILY BUT GRADUALLY APPROACHING RECONCILIATION. DAMASCUS ACCORD MARKS INITIAL ATTEMPT TO TEST EACH OTHER'S INTENTIONS REGARDING FUTURE MOVES IN LEBANON WITHOUT GIVING AWAY SUBSTANTIVE NEGOTIATING POINTS AT THIS EARLY STAGE. SOVIETS, WHO REPORTEDLY HAVE PRESSURED SARG TO RECONCILE WITH PALESTINIANS, NVAY NOW FIND SYRIAN TELLING THEM TO WORK FOR PALESTINAIN ADHERENCE TO AGREEMENT. JOINT STATEMENT ACCOMPANYING AGREEMENT EMBARRASSED EGYPT AND RESULTED IN STRONGLY-WORDED RETORT FROM CAIRO PLUS HASTY REAFFIRMATIONS OF EGYPTIAN-PALESTINIAN TIES FROM ARAFAT AND SAID KAMAL. ASAD HAS SHOWN DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN CRITICS OF HIS LEBANESE POLICY THAT HE MAINTAINING TOUGH YET FLEXIBLE POSTURE TOWARD PALESTINIANS, AND IF AGREEMENT NOT IMPLEMENTED, HE IS ON FIRM GROUND TO LAY BLAME ON ARAFAT. IF AGREEMENT PROVES EFFECTIVE, ASAD WILL BE ABLE TO NEGOTIATE ISSUE OF LEBANESE/SECURITY/SYRIAN MILITARY WITHDRAWAL FROM POSITION OF STRENGTH. CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 DAMASC 05080 021602Z

IN OUR VIEW, ASAD DERIVED SOME BENEFIT FROM ACCORD AND ARAFAT LOST LITTLE SUBSTANTIAL.

6. DELAY IN IMPLEMENTATION, HOWEVER, COULD WORK TO INCREASE SYRIAN ADVANTAGE AS CURRENT MOMENTUM ON THE GROUND IN LEBANON IS AGAINST PALESTINAIN/LEFTIST FORCES. IN ADDITION TO CONTINUING CHRISTIAN OFFENSIVE IN BEIRUT AND THE METN, THERE ARE REPORTS OF SYRIAN MILITARY ACTION IN JEZZINE AREA AND NORTH. DESPITE SOME RESUPPLY AND REINFORCEMENT NOW BEING RECEIVED BY PALESTINIANS, IT SEEMS TO US THAT THE LONGER ARAFAT DELAYS HIS VISIT TO DAMASCUS, THEREBY TRIGGERING THE NEXT STEPS UNDER THE ACCORD, THE MORE TIME IT ALLOWS FOR SYRIAN AND CHRISTIAN FORCES TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR CONTROL OVER AREAS THEY OCCUPY OR HAVE UNDER PRESSURE. MURPHY

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